

# FACT SHEET

L-1731

## NUTRITION AND THE TEEN SCENE

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A teenager determines his own food choices just as he determines his preferences for sports, fashion, music and dancing. Teenagers can usually eat large amounts of food at three or more meals a day, especially during the growth spurt. The adolescent growth spurt occurs in boys 13 to 15 years old and in girls 10 to 11 years old. Eating too much of the wrong foods can add unwanted pounds and may contribute to a poor complexion, slouchy posture, a poor figure or physique and even illness.

Good nutrition depends on developing daily habits which will lead to an adequate intake of food to supply the teenager with the energy and essential nutrients of the growing body.

### Teenagers' Food Habits

Research reveals that, as a group, teenagers have the poorest eating habits. Girls' habits tend to be poorer than boys'. When girls and boys reach adolescence, their energy and nutrient needs sharply increase. Teens become more involved in school activities which take them away from home. Their food habits - frequently not good before - become even poorer; during this age, therefore, teens are not as physically fit as they could be.

Many young girls show the effects of poor food habits and malnutrition prior to childbearing. Teenage mothers are faced with the increased nutritional requirements for the preparation and growth of their own bodies and for developing and feeding their own babies.

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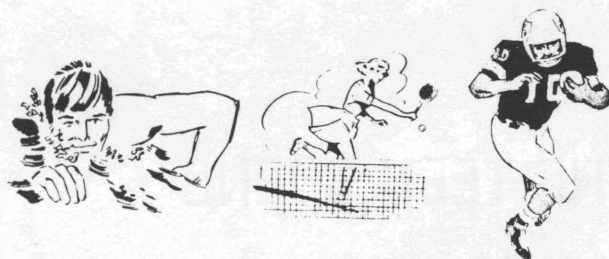


To insure the well-being of the next generation, fathers also must be healthy and eat balanced diets. Often children will follow the eating habits of their fathers; therefore, nutrition is especially important for both teenage girls and boys.

Meal skipping is a common habit in adolescence. Missing a meal does not mean weight loss because the teen will probably eat more at the next meal. Studies have shown that teens who eat breakfast make sharper decisions and become less tired than those who skip breakfast. Teens need to realize the importance of a good breakfast and allow time to eat one.

Teens often make poor snack selections. Studies in Iowa showed that one-fourth of the calories in a teenager's diet were from snacks - the same amount as one full meal. Teens frequently eat "empty calorie" snack foods which are high in fats and sugars with little nutritive value except for the calories. If meals are planned properly, snacks can be included in the diet.

Teenagers sometimes feel that fad diets are the easy way to lose weight and have the slim, trim figure of their favorite idol. Teens often go on diets which are extremely low in nutrients and calories only to find themselves in a weakened condition with lower resistance to illness. More harm could be done by these fad diets, but most of them are so monotonous that it is difficult to stay on them for any period of time.



Teens may fail to drink enough milk because they feel it will make them fat or they think it is for children. Misinformed teenage athletes sometime avoid milk and starches, and wrestlers avoid meals to qualify for a lower weight class. There are no magical foods that enable teens to be super stars. A combination of all foods keeps the body healthy and strong.

### Teenagers' Diets

Well-fed younger children may become poorly-fed teenagers because increased school activities keep them away from home during regular meal hours. Poorly-fed teenagers ate less than two-thirds of the nutrients recommended by the Foods and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council.

Research has shown that teenagers have poor diets. Six of every 10 girls tend to have poor diets. In other words, they get two-thirds or less of nutrients required for their age by the National Research Council.

Teens Need Better Diets		
	Out of 10 Girls	Out of 10 Boys
Protein	2	0
Calcium	5	2
Iron	5	1
Vitamin A	3	1
Vitamin C	4	4
Thiamine	3	2
Riboflavin	3	1

Figure 1 - This Table shows the number of teen boys and girls who do not get recommended levels of nutrients daily; i.e., two of each of the girls did not get adequate protein daily.

As shown in Figure 1, girls tend to lack recommended amounts of calcium, iron and Vitamin C; boys tend to lack calcium, thiamine and Vitamin C. Figure 1 also emphasizes that girls are more poorly fed than boys and Vitamin C is the only nutrient low for the same number of girls and boys.

Boys rate better than girls in other nutrients because they consume more calories. A 15 year old boy requires 3000 calories as compared to 2100 for a 15 year old girl. If a teenager eats approximately one-third more calories, then he gets more nutrients. Boys not only eat more nutrients but they tend to select better diets also.

### Improving Teenage Eating Habits

If the teenager's goal is vitality, good looks and happiness in the future, he or she should avoid fad diets. Teenagers need a variety of foods that will give their body the proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals they need to enjoy good health. The best way to get these nutrients is to use the number and size servings from each of the Basic Four Food Groups recommended in Table 1.

A good breakfast will help the teenager start the day full of energy with an alert mind and a forward outlook to the day's activities. After the fast during the night, the body needs replenishing. A good breakfast should furnish about one-fourth of the day's intake of calories and nutrients. Using the Daily Food Guide, teens should include a protein food, milk, a source of Vitamin C and enough bread and cereal to supply energy. A ham and egg sandwich on a bun, orange juice and hot chocolate would be an example of a nutritious breakfast.

Maintaining normal weight is important. If overweight or underweight, a teenager should visit a doctor before beginning a weight reduction or gaining program. The doctor will help determine the amount of weight to lose or gain and prescribe a diet. Self-prescribed diets of extensive fasting or formula diets are dangerous and usually fail, so teens should avoid them and cut down calories by eating the lower calorie choices from the four food groups as shown in Figure 2.

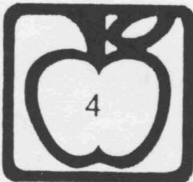
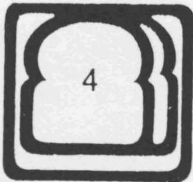


To Lower Calories	To Raise Calories
Use skim milk instead of whole.	Add more servings from the food guide.
Eat lower-calorie fruits and vegetables.	Eat higher-calorie foods.
	Add other foods such as margarine or sweets.

If snacking is a big part of the teenager's food pattern, snacks can be planned around the Basic Four Food Groups. Snacks high in nutrients and lower in calories such as fruit, fruit juices, peanuts, cheese wedges, bananas, crackers, carrots, celery or popcorn

can be eaten frequently. Snacks such as soft drinks or candy can be eaten sparingly if additional calories are needed after basic food needs are met.

Foods eaten at fast food restaurants may be nutritious but generally are higher in calories. Teens should select food choices wisely whether eating at home, school, church or out at a restaurant to limit calories.

Parents can help teenagers form good eating habits and patterns during this crucial period by understanding a teen's nutritional needs and serving as good examples. Teens who make wise food choices and are physically fit will have more "go" power for sports, dancing and daily activities.

Food Groups		Foods Included	Value in Diet
	<b>FRUIT &amp; VEGETABLE</b> 1 for Vitamin C 1 for Vitamin A 2 others	citrus fruits dark green and yellow vegetables others	Supplies vitamin C necessary for healthy tissues. Supplies vitamin A for maintaining healthy skin and good eyesight.
	<b>BREAD AND CEREAL</b> slices of bread or cups of cereal	breads cereals noodles	Supplies energy. Enriched products supply iron which helps maintain healthy blood. They also supply the B-vitamins which function in maintaining a good digestive tract and help the body use energy from food.
	<b>MILK</b> cups of whole milk or slices of cheese	milk, buttermilk, skim milk, flavored milk cheese yogurt ice cream	Supplies calcium for strong bones and teeth.
	<b>MEAT</b> servings of meat, fish, eggs or dried beans (not fried)	meat poultry fish eggs dry beans or peas nuts	Supplies protein which helps build strong, healthy muscles, promotes growth, and helps resist infection.



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